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ABSTRACT

Applying reader response theory, a study explored the responses of 19 pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers to two dissimilar young adult novels, one about teenage pregnancy and one about adolescent alcoholism. Quantitative analysis, using a modified version of the Purves-Rippere (1968) system, and qualitative analysis of written answers to open-ended posttest questions and in-depth interviews, revealed that readers were highly involved with both books, and discussions with participants about the books involved similar topics. The nature of responses to the books, however, differed markedly. Readers sympathized with the alcoholic protagonist and appreciated learning about an unfamiliar situation, but were more intensely involved with the pregnant protagonist, empathizing strongly with her. Participants were able to identify more closely with the various aspects of the story, authoritatively evaluate the work's realism, and critically judge the protagonist's decisions. Because of the vague endings of both stories, participants often speculated about the protagonists' final decisions, but a more significant number projected their own decisions about pregnancy onto the pregnant protagonist. Implications for the study included the ideas that reading such adolescent literature can be valuable for convincing reluctant readers that reading can be enjoyable, but that teachers and librarians must be aware of and prepared for the strong emotional responses adolescents may have to literature that mirrors their own experiences. (JC)

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Reader-Responses of Pregnant Adolescents and Teenage Mothers to Young Adult Novels Portraying Protagonists with Problems Similar and Dissimilar to the Readers'

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Abstract

This study explored the responses of pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers to two dissimilar young adult novels, one about teenage pregnancy and one about adolescent alcoholism. Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that readers were highly involved with both books and discussions about them involved similar topics. The nature of responses to the books, however, differed markedly. Readers sympathized with the alcoholic protagonist and appreciated learning about an unfamiliar situation. Readers were, however, more intensely involved with the pregnant protagonist, empathizing with her and finding comfort and support in the familiarity of her situation. Personal experience with pregnancy enabled readers to identify closely with various aspects of the story, authoritatively evaluate the work's realsim, and critically judge the protagonist's decisions. Examining autobiographical information proved crucial for understanding personal interpretations of the novel. The context in which one reads, therefore, must be considered.

Reader-Responses of Pregnant Adolescents and Teenage Mothers to Young Adult Novels Portraying Protagonists with Problems Similar and Dissimilar to the Readers'

Teenage pregnancy is a subject of concern both in reality and in fiction. Experts on early adolescent development rank concern about pregnancy as the fourth greatest problem worrying today's early adolescents (Compton & Skeleton, 1982, p. 21). In the last twenty years, this concern over teenage pregnancy has been reflected in the field of young adult fiction as novels about teenage pregnancy continue to be written and widely read. According to Dwight Burton (1984):

> The wide reading of books about teenager pregnancy probably results from the 'What must it be like?' syndrome. How would I tell my parents? My friends? What would I do? (pp. 8-9)

Adolescents, however, do not only worry and wonder about pregnancy; they also become pregnant. In fact, four out of every ten girls in the United States will become pregnant as teenagers (Alan Guttmacher, 1981, p. 21).

Along with its effects on the pregnant adolescent, her family and friends, teenage pregnancy also has implications for those who work with pregnant teens in an educational setting. In light of the high incidence of teenage pregnancies and the popularity of young adult novels about teenage pregnancy, a timely question for English teachers, reading teachers, and

librarians is, "How does a pregnant teenager or a teenage mother respond when she reads a book about a character in a situation similar to her own?" This question, which is significant both in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, formed the basis of this study.

Background

Exactly what literature should be included in the general secondary English curriculum and the critical and pedagogical approaches taken toward it are continuing controversies in American education. English literature was first introduced into the American secondary schools during the last half of the eighteenth century when specific English classics were admitted into the curriculum to serve as models for student compositions. Responding to the dictates of college entrance requirements throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century and into the first quarter of the twentieth century, secondary schools taught English (not American) classics selected from college-prescribed lists. In 1918, due to the patriotism engendered by World War I, American literature was established as an important curricular component (Hook & Evans, 1982, p. 5).

Contemporary literature was gradually included in the curriculum. In the first half of the twentieth century, secondary English programs ceased to ignore British "Johnnies-come-lately such as Burns, Scott, and Wordsworth" (Hook & Evans, 1982, p. 2). The teaching of

works by modern American writers like Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and J. D. Salinger along with, or in place of, the classics was advocated by Louise Rosenblatt and eventually accepted (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 219). Contemporary young adult literature entered the curriculum during the late 1960s when reading classes became part of the regular English curriculum. Students and teachers turned away from the classics, and elective courses in modern literature, including both adult and adolescent fiction, gained popularity with students (Nilsen & Donalson, 1985, p. 11). Thus in the latter half of the twentieth century, the range of literary materials now included in the curriculum has expanded from a limited list of approved English classics to selections which encompass American classics, contemporary British and American adult fiction, and contempory young adult fiction.

Expansions, changes, and emphases in literary curricula seldom occur in isolation; they are generally tied to some educational movement and its concommitant school of literary theory. Three schools of literary theory which have been influential in twentieth century secondary English pedagogy are the objectivist, subjectivist, and transactionalist. Each of these schools deals with the reader-text relationship according to its own philosophical roots, critical stance toward literature study, and pedagogical approach.

The objectivist theory, also referred to as formalism, structural analysis, or New Criticism, is philosophically rooted in perennialism and essentialism. Literary scholars associated with the objectivist theory include John Crowe Ransom, Alan Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Rene Wellek, Austin Warren, I. A. Richards, and T. S. Eliot. Its adherents view a literary work of art as a self-contained, autonomous object to be analyzed by close reading that emphasizes the uniqueness of literary language, the relationship of parts to the whole, and the existence of one textually correct interpretation. Central to this theory are the tenets of the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy.

The intentional fallacy states that readers, critics, even the author, can never really know what the author intended to say and must, therefore, rely only upon the actual words of the text. This concept directly opposes the historical, biographical literary approach traditionally used in secondary schools from the inception of literature study. The affective fallacy states that the reader's feelings about a work are irrelevant. This tenent is a direct reaction against the subjective romantic and impressionistic criticisms associated with earlier literary movements--critical approaches never embraced by secondary pedagogy due to the dominance of historical, biographical criticism. Attention to authorial intentions and reader's feelings

detracts from the impartial, scientific approach advocated by the objective critics, and thereby hinders the correct reading of the text.

Although the New Criticism movement began in America during the 1930s, it did not filter into secondary English curricula until the 1960s when Jerome Bruner's scientific-oriented educational reform movement created a climate that encouraged students to approach literature as "mini-scholars trained in the ways of the 'new criticism' to read closely and to explicate the text" (Hook & Evans, 1982, p. 9). While the text is clearly the focus of literature study, the classics, our literary masterpieces, with their rich literary form and timeless, universal themes, constitute the subject matter worthy of close structural analysis. Lectures and inductive activities designed to help students discover and understand the relationship of the literery elements within a work are the instructional mode generally employed by teachers using an objective approach. Critical essays by literary scholars are cited to help students grasp the true meaning of the work. Rich literary insights and disciplined minds are considered the rewards of this approach.

Diametrically opposed to the objectivist theory of the reader-text relationship is the subjectivist, or expressive theory. Tied to the philosophy of existentialism, subjective criticism focuses directly upon the reader and his or her ability to create personal

meaning from an otherwise meaningless text. The theory stresses that there are no textually inherent correct interpretations; a literary work means whatever the reader determines it to mean. While this theory of art has not reached the dimensions that the other two reader-text theories have in twentieth century America, it has two strong proponents in David Bleich and Stanley Fish. As far as secondary curricula are concerned, little evidence exists regarding a sustained subjective pedagogy. As John Clifford (1979) puts it:

> In Subjective Criticism the text is a Rorschach upon which we project feelings, ideas and scenes from our own minds. With the text so static, there is little of the self-ordering, self-corrective interaction between text and reader that makes transactional criticism such a useful strategy for high school teachers. (p. 39)

The subjective theory is important, however, because it emphasizes the complexity of reader-responses and respect for individual experiences with literature.

While the subjective and objective theories express extreme positions toward the reader-text relationship--one emphasizing the reader and the other emphasizing the text--the transactional theory represents a more balanced approach, giving equal importance to both the reader and the text. Transactionalism, philosophically akin to progressivism, pragmatism, and phenomenology, is often referred to as reader-response criticism. Rosenblatt

founded the reader-response movement in the 1930s as a reaction against the New Critics' denial of the reader's importance in the process of literary interpretation, advocacy of the affective fallacy, and belief in the existence of one correct interpretation. While Rosenblatt and other transactionalists, like Walter Slatoff, generally appreciate the objectivist emphasis upon close reading and de-emphasis of historical and biographical information, they consider the reader's personal response to the text essential to a full, rewarding literary experience. As the core of the literary experience, reader-response forms the foundation upon which personal, social, intellectual, and aesthetic insights begin to develop. By emphasizing the importance of reader-response, the transactionalists draw the reader into central focus.

The subjectivists also focus upon the reader, but the subjective and transactional theories differ markedly in terms of the reader-text relationship. While subjective critics view the text primarily as a stimulus for personal reactions and idiosyncratic interpretations, transactional critics perceive the text as a guide by which interpretations are not only created, but must also be justified. Although every interpretation is unique, depending upon an individual reader at a particular point in time, the reader does have a responsibility to try to produce a valid interpretation, one which can be tested by finding support in the text and does not represent

misreading or distortion. Validity of interpretation is achieved by constantly referring back and forth between the reader's responses and the text itself, revising as necessary. The text, therefore, is also drawn into central focus in the transactional theory. Both the reader *and* the text are necessary for a literary transaction to occur, and neither is an entity sufficient unto itself. Thus the phenomenon that occurs between the two, the reader's *response* to the text, becomes the foremost focus of the response-centered theory of transactional criticism.

Because the reader's response to literature is directly related to a personal *experience* with a literary text, and because transactionalism does not have the elitist overtones of the New Critics, the climate is prime for including a transactional approach in the secondary literature curriculum whenever a philosophy of progressive education prevails. The progressive education movement, which had been growing in the United States since early in the twentieth century, stressed reform of the traditional college preparatory curriculum, recommended inclusion of thematic approaches designed to expanded literary study into the social domains, and advocated the inclusion of contemporary literature. This movement, however, had limited lasting impact against the traditional historical-biographical approach until it was reintroduced and redefined during the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English (1966) as part of a

curriculum which emphasized student growth as opposed to subject matter (Judy, 1975, pp. 10-12).

The concept of a response-centered curriculum emerged from the various publications written about the proceedings and outcomes of this important Dartmouth Seminar. Rosenblatt, of course, had already provided a theoretical basis for response-centered literature study in Literature as Exploration (1938), and "all subsequent writers on response theory and practice may be seen as merging with or building upon her enduring work" (Ellis, 1985, p. 97). Following the Dartmouth Seminar, James Squire (1971) articulated the need to build upon Rosenblatt's work and provided a name for the approach when he wrote, "What we need is a response-centered curriculum" (p. 91). Alan Purves (1972) responded to this need for the secondary level curriculum by editing How Porcupines Make Love. Stephen and Susan Judy (1983); Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth Donelson (1985); Dwight Burton, Kenneth Donelson, Bryant Fillion, and Beverly Haley (1975); J. N. Hook and William Evans (1982); and Robert Probst (1984) have recently written textbooks advocating the importance of reader-response in the literary curriuculum. A synthesis of some of the ideas espoused by these English education scholars provides the general concept of the response-centered curriculum.

The basic aim of the response-centered curriculum is to use literary experiences to help students develop personal, social, intellectual, and aesthetic insights.

Pedagogy used to achieve this aim involves classroom atmosphere, educational activities, and literary materials. A response-centered approach requires an atmosphere which fosters the development of self-confidence, respect for others, and enjoyment of literature. In such an atmosphere, students can successfully participate in writing and speaking activities which call for honest expression of their responses to literature, sharing of these responses with others, and examining them in light of new information gleaned from outside sources. Writing and speaking activities that evoke the expression, sharing, and examination of responses often begin with the student's experience with the work and build from there. Writing assignments, therefore, might begin with unstructured written responses which are later developed into more formal essays. Speaking activities might involve one-to-one, small group, or whole class discussions.

Carefully designed writing assignments and skillfully facilitated discussions enable students to learn about themselves, others, concepts, and literature. Students gain personal insight as they explore the private and textual factors which produced their unique responses. Social insights occur as students discover similarities and differences among their responses and those of other discussion participants. Intellectual insights result from exposure to the author's ideas,

research inspired by these ideas (possibly about the historical and biographical information related to the work), and sharing of informative discoveries with other readers. Asethetic insights are created as students examine their experience with the content and form of a work, connect it with other literary experiences, and thereby discover how literary works of art achieve aesthetic effectiveness. Skilled teachers guide students toward such insights, which do not necessarily occur in this order, as they judge them to be in accordance with individual and group developmental levels.

While the teacher's skills at creating a climate conducive to sharing responses and designing effective response-describing and insight-developing activities are essential to the response-centered curriculum, so is the selection of literary materials students will read. Central to the response-centered curriculum is the assumption that the "teacher's desire will be to give the youth as wide a range of relevant experiences as possible at his level of development" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 222). The relevance of the reading experience is essential because it forms the basis for a vital transaction between the reader and the text. The appropriate developmental level is also critical because undemanding works can be unsatisfying just as works that are too demanding can be frustrating. Either situation decreases the potential for the reader's literary enjoyment.

For some students, the classics will provide relevant experiences at appropriate developmental levels. For others, however, "comparatively recent works will speak more profoundly and constructively to the boy and girl than will much 'greater' works of the past" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 222). For many students unable to meet the challenge of more demanding classic or contemporary material, popular literature written for young adults offers texts with which "the freest, most honest, and most personal literary transactions will occur" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 140). These transactions occur because, in contrast to the classics which tend to put students at a disadvantage, well-written young adult literature "invites, welcomes students to meet it as equals" (Small, 1977, p. 57). When reader and text transact as equals, the quality of the transaction increases, as does the the reader's self-confidence, enjoyment of literature, and potential for growth. The response-centered curriculum relies upon teachers guiding students toward literature they can meet as equals, engage in, and find personally significant--texts which provide rich, satisfying, insight-producing transactions that will facilitate optimal student growth.

In their search for literature to meet this challenge, many teachers and librarians have joined students in the discovery of the young adult problem novel. Indeed, problem novels "make up what many people consider to be the main body of modern young adult

literature" (Nilsen & Donelson, 1985, p. 79). These books, directed specifically at a young adult audience, deal with real-life problems of adolescents such as teenage pregnancy, abortion, marriage, alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide, homosexuality, death of family and friends, obesity, anorexia nervosa, terminal illnesses, family violence and tensions, and parental divorce. They are popular not only because they provide texts to which a majority of students can feel equal, but because they treat their subject matter candidly and realistically. They also provide insight into personal problems and the problems of others by providing opportuniies for vicarious experiences. For many students, problem novels are the stuff that intense transactions are made of, laying the groundwork for the personal, social, and intellectual, and even aesthetic growth the response-centered approach to literature seeks to develop.

Problem novels are most often included in literature courses as free-choice reading material, either for individuals or as part of thematic units, and less often as required reading for the whole class. Regardless of how they are used, in a response-centered situation students will be speaking and writing their affective responses to these books, and teachers will need to attend to these responses. And because problem novels are about problems that concern teenagers, and not always indirectly, a student may read a book about

a situation in which he or she is directly and intensely involved. This is the situation this study explored.

Statement of the Problem

More specifically, this study examined the nature of the responses of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers to a young adult problem novel about teenage pregnancy and, for comparison purposes, a young adult problem novel about adolescent alcoholism. It sought to describe, quantitatively and qualitatively, *how* these readers responded and *what* they wrote after reading about literary situations similar and dissimilar to their own. In addition, the study explored the process of response, the transaction, for the purpose of examining the interrelationship between autobiographical information and literary response in an attempt to ascertain *why* readers responded as they did.

Questions the Study Sought to Answer

In the process of exploring this situation, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the responses given by pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers to a young adult problem novel about teenage pregnancy as compared to their responses to a young adult problem novel about adolescent alcoholism?

2. How does autobiographical information relate to the responses given?

Description of Research Methodology

To answer these questions, research was conducted at a school for pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers, located in a large suburban school district in one of the Rocky Mountain states. The school's student body was composed of predominately white, middle-class, adolescents who were pregnant or had recently been pregnant. The majority of the students were seventeen-year-old high school juniors.

The young adult problem novels selected for the study had protagonists whose age, race, socio-economic backgrounds, and family situations closely resembled the study's participants. The two protagonsts, however, experienced dissimilar problems. In Lauren by Harriett Lugar (1979), Lauren grapples with teen pregnancy, a problem familiar to the study's participants. In Linnea Due's High and Outside (1980), Nikki struggles with adolescent alcoholism, a problem of equal magnitude to teen pregnancy, but one with which the participants had no direct personal experience. Lauren and Nikki behave similarly in light of their problems, denying their existence, running away, breaking up with boyfriends, turning to friends, and finally deciding how to handle their predicaments. The novels' contents closely approximate each other even though the problems differ.

These novels were also selected because their forms match closely. Both books were written at a low enough reading level to make them easily assessable for average

secondary students. In addition, their lengths approximate each other; both contain much dialogue and action; and each treats its subject realistically. Although told from different points of view, both books have vague endings. A jury of experts judged thesebooks to be appropriately similar in form and content to offer equally rich reading transactions for the study's participants.

Nineteen students volunteered to participate in the study. The research methods used to explore the reactions of pregnant adolescents to these two problem novels included two written retrospective protocols, two questionnaries, interviews with students, consultation with staff members, and perusal of student records. In two different writing sessions, students provided a free-response protocol for each book in which they wrote about their feelings, thoughts, opinions, or other reactions to the book just completed. The instructions for the free-responses were broad enough to elicit affective, cognitive, evaluative, or any other type responses students wanted to give, but vague enough not to bias responses toward investigator expectations. Students were allowed to choose the order in which they read the books. Thus, some students read Lauren first while others began with High and Outside. To eliminate a learning effect from the first writing to the second, subjects knew what they would be asked to write before the first writing session.

Two questionnaires were designed to supplement free-response data. The pre-reading questionnaire asked for personal information related to the student's health, pregnancy, school attendance, grade in school, age, grade point average, marital status, living situation, decision regarding the pregnancy, parents' marital status, parents' occupations, husband's and/or own occupation, family situation in parents' home, plans for the future, attitude toward reading, reading preferences, knowledge of the books to be used, and willingness to participate in the study.

The post-reading questionnaire addressed the questions of why one book was chosen first, likeness of characters in each novel to the reader, protagonists' decisions at the end of the books, comparative interest in the two novels, comparative interest in these books and other books read, comparative enjoyment of the two books, comparative enjoyment between these books and others read, and feelings about participating in the study.

Except for the questions concerning family situation, future plans, and reading attitude and preferences, the questions in the pre-reading questionnaire had structured choices to mark. The questions in the post-reading questionnaire were open-ended and asked for reasons underlying the responses. Students were told there were no right or

wrong answers. They could leave questions unanswered if they wished.

Interviews were also conducted with selected students for the purpose of clarifying or deepening responses given on written protocols and questionnaires. Each student interviewed was shown her own questionnaires and typed protocols to remind her of what she had responded, and then asked questions concerning their contents. Specific questions formulated for each subject prior to the interview were asked as well as impromptu questions inspired by oral responses. No set questions were asked every student interviewed, but the investigator was generally concerned with drawing out autobiographical information related to individual transactions with the novels. Due to the delicacy of the topic and the desire to avoid investigator-pleasing answers, questions about subjects' personal experiences were open-ended and generally vague unless the investigator sensed more specific questions would be suitable and fruitful. The investigator probed as deeply as was possible and appropriate.

In addition to the written protocols, questionnaires, and interviews, the investigator consulted staff members and student records in an effort to determine *why* the student responded as she did to the novels and to triangulate the investigator's thoughts and conclusions. Data collection took place over a six week period.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis was both quantitative and qualitative and took place in three stages designed to explore *how*, *what*, and *why* participants responded to novels about characters in situations similar or dissimilar to their own.

Quantitative Content Analysis

The first stage of data analysis, which explored *how* the students responded, utilized a modified version of the Purves-Rippere (1968) system of content analysis to quantitatively analyze the written protocols.

The modifed Purves-Rippere system included twenty-seven scoring units, or labels that could be applied to any of the possible statements a reader might make about the book, rather than the original system's one hundred thirty nine scoring units. The modified system included five general response categories, seven subcategories, and fourteen elements of response.

The five categories of general response, the major types of responses readers make to works of fiction, are defined as follows. *Engagement-Involvement* responses signify the reader's personal involvement with the literary work. *Perception* responses indicate the reader is relating to the work as an objective entity. *Interpretation* responses indicate the reader has gone beyond the work in search of meaning. *Evaluation* responses denote judgment on the part of the reader.

Miscellaneous responses are statements not identified as one of these four.

Seven subcategories and fourteen elements of response were added to the five general categories to identify more specific distinctions within response categories and highlight similarities and differences in readers' responses to two books about different problems, but resembling each other in general content and form. Statements unclassifiable as specific elements could be scored according to subcategory or major category units.

In addition to reducing the number of scoring units in the Purves-Rippere system, some of the elements, the most specific scoring units, were slightly altered. Because the study was particularly concerned with autobiographical information, the element concerning the relation of incidents in the novel to those in the reader's life was designated as two elements in an attempt to attain a finer discrimination between autobiographical and associational responses. Another modification entailed adding the words *or future* to the element which previously concerned only inferences about the past or present. Lastly, the element which originally identified general literary comparisons was changed to indicate a specific comparison between Lauren and High and Outside. The list of the twenty-seven scoring units selected and the numerical code assigned them by Purves and Rippere (1968) follows:

100 Engagement-Involvement General

110 Reaction to Literature

120 Reaction to Form

130 Reaction to Content

- 131 Moral reaction
- 132 Conjecture
- 133 Identification
- 134 Autobiographical
- 135 Associational

200 Perceptional General

230 Content Unspecified

- 231 Subject matter
- 232 Action
- 233 Character identification and description
- 234 Character relationships

260 Tone Unspecified

300 Interpretation General

320 Interpretation of Content Unspecified

- 321 Inference about past, present, or future
- 322 Character analysis

400 Evaluation General

430 Evaluation of Author's Vision Unspecified

- 431 Mimetic plausibility
- 432 Moral significance

500 Miscellaneous General

504 Comparison between Lauren and High and Outside

Quantitative analysis of the written protocols entailed coding of student responses according to these twenty-seven scoring units. In preparation for coding, each written protocol was typed and divided into response units. The independent clause was the basic response unit. Thus, compound sentences were considered two units and complex sentences were considered one. Sentence fragments were treated as independent clauses. Sentences containing predicate adjectives were considered as one unit for each predicate adjective. Response units were numbered consecutively. Due to the nature of the student's writing, these divisions were not always easily distinguishable. An example of a protocol written about Lauren and prepared for coding follows:

> I thought it was a good book,/<1> but I didn't like how the author made her out to be so immature./<2> Lauren was seventeen years old,/<3> she made her out to be twelve./<4> But other than that I felt it was a very educational book//<5> and good for young people to read./<6> It states the bare facts of life, and what could happen to some young people./<7>

Three coders were trained to label each response unit as one of the twenty-seven scoring units. Training each coder took approximately five hours and relied heavily upon suggestions and examples provided by

Victoria Rippere (1968). Coding decisions were discussed with the investigator until each coder felt confident about the procedure. Coders then coded the study's written protocols independently.

After the coding, scores for each subject were recorded on individual scoresheets. The score given each response unit by each of the three coders was recorded. Whenever two or more coders agreed on the scoring of a response unit, either in terms of general category or specific scoring unit, that score became the official score used in statistical analyses of protocols. When no agreement occurred among coders, no score (or NA) was recorded for that response unit. This procedure was followed for both protocols written by each subject. Writing times and order in which books were read were also noted on this scoresheet.

Scores from the individual scoresheets were tabulated, indicating the number of times each subject used each of the twenty-seven scoring units and the frequency with which her responses fell into one of the five general categories. Total numbers of responses for each specific scoring unit and its general category were calculated. This procedure was followed for response scores for both books. Differences in the group's responses to the two books were compared by computing a t-test for paired scores for each individual scoring unit and each of the five general categories.

Questionnaire responses lending themselves to statistical analysis were tallied and reported to enhance the over-all description of group responses.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Following the completion of the quantitative analysis, the investigator analyzed the original written protocols to examine what the subjects had actually said about the two young adult novels. Following a procedure suggested by Benton (1984), she read and reread the written protocols, making informal notes until response patterns emerged (p. 274). Statements made during interviews and answers to questionnaire items were also studied for insights into subjects' responses to the books.

Based on emergent patterns of the qualitative content analysis, three subjects were selected for more in-depth analysis. The investigator scrutinized the complete protocols--the questionnaires, written protocols, and interview protocols--of these girls to determine possible reasons for their particular responses. She also consulted staff members at the research site, checked student records, and referred to her research log to make the investigation as thorough as possible.

Findings

Analysis of respondents' complete protocols

revealed that participants welcomed the opportunity to read and respond to young adult problem novels. They generally liked the books used in the study more than other books they had read because these were realistic portrayals of teenage problems. Participants' based the order in which they read the books on interest in particular subject matter. The books' low reading levels did not offend most readers. The original questions posed for the study are discussed as follows.

1. What is the nature of the responses given by pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers to a young adult problem novel about teenage pregnancy as compared to their responses to a young adult problem novel about adolescent alcoholism?

Manner of responses. Quantitative analysis of written free-responses using the five major response categories identified by Purves and Rippere (1968) revealed that participants responded in similar manners to both novels. Distribution of responses to both books followed the same pattern. *Engagement-Involvement* was the most frequently used response type, followed by *Evaluation, Interpretation, Miscellaneous,* and *Perception,* in that order. This pattern, particularly the high frequency of *Engagement- Involvement* responses, demonstrated that both novels provided readers the opportunity for rich literary transactions.

Identification of response types using more specific elements did not show that readers volunteered more autobiographical information when writing about the

novel with a familiar situation than when writing about the novel with an unfamiliar situation. Qualitative analysis, however, revealed that readers *did* provide more autobiographical information when writing about the teen pregnancy novel, but this information was frequently embedded in statements not specifically classified as autobiographical.

Content of responses. Qualitative content analysis revealed that respondents discussed similar topics when writing about each book. These topics involved interest in, enjoyment of and relating to the book; relating to the ending of the book; disclosure of autobiographical information; moral reactions to characters' actions and decisions; the relationship of personal experiences to responses; evaluation of the book's verisimilitude; the value of the book; the importance of young adult novel problem novels; overall judgments; and comparison of the two books.

Qualitative analysis of the content of responses confirmed the quantitative finding that readers were highly involved while reading both books, but also revealed similarities and differences in the nature of reader-involvement with each book. Readers found the teenage pregnancy book interesting and enjoyable reading because they could readily relate to the protagonist and her problem. They liked and enjoyed the adolescent alcoholic novel because it provided information about an

unfamiliar subject. Readers displayed more enthusiasm for the teenage pregnancy novel due to its perceived realism and relevancy.

Respondents considered reading both books a personally valuable experience; they felt comforted by the teenage pregnancy novel and enlightened by the adolescent alcoholism novel. They particularly believed others should read the book on teenage pregnancy to increase understanding of girls like themselves. Young adult problem novels were perceived as a viable means for disseminating information about teenage problems and helping teenagers make important decisions.

The relationships among the readers and characters in the two books differed both in degree and quality. Most readers were able to relate closely to the pregnant protagonist. They did not, however, relate closely to the alcoholic protagonist, but rather to her best friend who was loyal and caring. They expressed empathy for the pregnant protangonist and sympathy for the adolescent alcoholic. Readers who were distressed about the books' vague endings were more concerned about what happened to the pregnant protagonist than the alcoholic protagonist. Although readers had definite opinions about the behavior of the protagonists and other characters in both books, they stated their opinions concerning characters in the teen pregnancy novel with more conviction. Readers analyzed the motives of the adolescent alcoholic in an attempt to understand her behavior, but showed an

implicit understanding of the pregnant teenager's behavior.

Readers disclosed autobiographical information when responding to both books. This information was both specific and general, and stated directly and indirectly with both books; however, the nature of this personal data differed with each book. Respondents revealed specific information about themselves and their personal experiences when discussing the teenage pregnancy novel. Readers made general self-references when discussing the adolescent alcoholism novel, but volunteered specific information about their family and friends, thereby providing indirect autobiographical information about themselves. Along with the direct autobiographical statements made in response to the teen pregnancy novel, readers frequently embedded personal data in statements about the book and its characters.

2. How does autobiographical information relate to the responses given?

Although readers disclosed autobiographical information in response to both books, they revealed more about themselves when discussing the teenage pregnancy novel. The above question, therefore, will be discussed primarily as it relates to the teen pregnancy novel.

Readers' personal characteristics and experiences enabled them to closely identify with aspects of the story involving circumstances similar to their own. These aspects included initial feelings about pregnancy;

behavior of parents, boyfriends, and friends; running away from home; thoughts of suicide; and the decision to relinquish a child. Familiarity with one or more of these aspects enabled readers to identify and empathize with the pregnant protagonist. The amount of overlap between these aspects and personal experiences required for identification with the protagonist varied from reader to reader. General concern for others with problems enabled readers to sympathize with the adolescent alcoholic and identify with her helpful friend.

In addition to generating initial identification with aspects of the story, readers' personal experiences influenced the manner in which they responded to the story. Readers gauged the books' verisimilitude according to their personal experiences. Direct experience with a situation, as in the case of teenage pregnancy, led readers to assume an authoritative role when assessing the work's realism. Lack of experience with a situation, such as adolescent alcoholism or living on welfare, led readers to accept its treatment as realistic. The book's perceived verisimilitude also influenced the reader's ability to relate to its characters. Both initial and ongoing responses, therefore, were interrelated with readers' autobiographical information.

Readers' interpretations of the pregnant protagonist's actions also demonstrated the

interrelationship between reader-responses and autobiographical information. These interpretations were strongly influenced by the varying degrees to which readers related to the protagonist. Some readers related closely, yet were able to distinguish differences between themselves and the pregnant protagonist. They were able to identify aspects of the novel to which they could closely relate, such as feelings of confusion and treatment by parents and friends, but were able to understand why the protagonist might decide to relinquish her child even though they may not have made the same decision themselves. These readers had what Rosenblatt would call a rich literary transaction which resulted in an adequate evocation, or interpretation.

Other readers related so closely that they were unable to tolerate discrepancies between themselves and the pregnant protagonist and, like the single mothers who said the pregnant protagonist decided to keep her baby, projected their own feelings and behaviors onto her. Such interpretations, so highly influenced by personal experience and intense identification with the protagonist, would be viewed from different perspectives by various reader-response researchers and theorists, all who recognize that autobiographical information can influence reader-response.

Just as scholars recognize the interrelationship between autobiographical information and reader-response, readers themselves were sometimes aware that their

experience or lack of experience with situations influenced their responses to the books.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study:

Literary Transactions

Readers enjoy novels which afford rich literary transactions; young adult problem novels frequently provide the intense reading experiences necessary for such rich literary transactions. Adolescent readers become highly involved while reading young adult problem novels about personally unfamiliar situations and appreciate these novels for their educational aspects. Adolescent readers also become highly involved when reading young adult problem novels about familiar situations, but the quality of their involvement is intensified by reader identification based on personal experience with the novel's problem. While many readers derive comfort from reading about a familiar problem, the closeness of a topic to a personal situation may make some readers uncomfortable.

Interrelationship between Autobiographical Information and Reader-Responses

The interrelationship between autobiographical information and reader-response begins with the initial identification with a literary character and continues to

influence the nature of the response throughout the literary transaction. Personal experience with a situation depicted in a novel enhances reader identification with the novel's characters. A reader's intense identification with a protagonist with a familiar problem results in feelings of empathy; a reader's increased understanding of a protangonist with an unfamiliar problem results in feelings of sympathy. Readers judge the realism of young adult problem novels according to their own experiences. Characters or incidents in a novel about a familiar situation that do not correspond with the readers' experience may be regarded as unrealistic. On the other hand, readers tend to accept treatments of unfamiliar situations as realistic.

Misinterpretations

Reader-responses to novels involving familiar problems are often personal interpretations based on autobiographical information rather than literary knowledge. Such personal interpretations of an aspect of a novel may be construed as misinterpretations or distortions. When considered in light of the reader's autobiographical information, however, they can provide insight into the nature of the reader's unique literary transaction.

Methodology

Used in isolation, the Purves-Rippere system

of quantitative content analysis is an inadequate schema for comparing responses to dissimilar novels because it does not distinguish among the subtle differences inherent in the content of responses. Qualitative content analysis is necessary for a complete description of reader-responses.

The response-centered approach with its commensurate methods and materials is pedagogically appropriate for studying reader-responses to young adult problem novels.

Implications

The following implications were drawn from the study's conclusions:

Implications for Teaching

The study's conclusions suggest the following implications for teaching:

1. Because familiarity with a topic engenders intense identification with literary characters, teachers need to be aware that readers may have strong personal responses when reading about situations with which they have had personal experience. The sensitivity with which personal responses are handled could well determine whether the student will continue to seek satisfying reading experiences, or become alienated from the literary world. Because teachers and librarians are not always aware of readers' autogiographcial information, the response-centered approach assures that personal

responses will be respected and provides a means for helping readers' understand the interrelationship between their personal experiences and their responses to the literary work. This approach is particularly well-suited for public school settings because, while it acknowledges the importance of the reader's experience with the topic, personal responses are considered within the context of a literary transaction, thereby avoiding personal analysis that teachers and librarians are untrained to handle.

2. Young adult problem novels have a high potential for being the right book for a particular reader at a certain time. Novels closely matched to a readers' personal characteristics and preoccupations can provide desirably intense reading experiences. Novels with a protagonist who is racially or socio-economically different from the reader but struggles with a problem similar to the reader's can provide poignant reading experiences that may help bridge cultural gaps. Young adult problem novels about unfamiliar situations can provide satisfying reading experiences as readers enjoy identifying with peers and learning about typical and unusual teenage problems. It is important, therefore, that teachers and librarians not discount this genre because its subject matter may seem too extreme for teenage readers.

3. As was mentioned earlier, four out of every ten girls in America will become pregnant as teenagers. Because the participants in this study were typcially

white, middle-class, and from families who cared about them, they may not fit the stereotype some people have of pregnant teenagers. It is probable, however, that teachers and librarians in schools serving students of *any* socio-economic make-up will encounter girls who are, have been, or will become pregnant teenagers. It is important that teachers and librarians in middle-class schools remain sensitive to the fact that they may be working with students who have had personal experience with pregnancy and that literature involving pregnancy, abortion, adoption, and/or unmarried mothers may elicit strong personal reactions and interpretations from these readers. Since literature containing such topics is not limited to young adult problem novels, but incorporates classics like The Scarlet Letter and Tess of the D'Ubervilles, teachers and librarians must be prepared for personal responses this literature may elict.

Implications for Research

The study's conclusions suggest the following implications for research:

1. If quantitative analysis is desired, a system which discriminates between more subtle responses, like positive and negative reactions to a work, needs to be devised.

2. The study might be replicated using adolescent alcoholics to gain their perspectives on these novels.

3. The study might be replicated using teenage

fathers to gain their perspectives on these novels.

4. A broader study involving pregnant teenagers with varying socio-ecomomic status might be conducted to explore their responses to young adult pregnancy novels.

5. A study in which pregnant teenagers undecided about what they will do regarding marriage and the baby read a variety of teen pregnancy novels and later discuss whether or not they influenced their final decision might reveal information about the significance of young adult problem novels.

6. The responses made by pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers to classic literature involving conception outside of marriage might be conducted to explore the effect of autobiographical information on their responses to a type of literature they may encounter in English literature courses.

Final Statement

This study exposes one more piece of, what Purves and Rippere (1968) call, the iceberg of response to literature (p. xiii). To increase the impact of reader-response research, a meta-analysis of studies related to response to literature needs to be conducted. Such an analysis could provide a research context which might solidify the various pieces of the iceberg. Just as this study has sought to present a wholistic description of reader-responses by analyzing its data

within the context of the research site and the personal experiences and preoccupations of its subjects, a research context might further illuminate the interrelationships among the findings of this study and others that have been and will be conducted on response to literature.

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